

## SYSTEM FOR EQUILIBRATING AN ENERGY STORAGE DEVICE

### FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a system for equilibrating an energy storage device, in particular based on rechargeable battery cells, such as electrochemical cells or supercapacitors.

5 These storage devices are commonly used in the industrial and aeronautical media, as backup energy source, when the supply network is defective, or on startup. It is very important to maintain these devices in a complete state of charge, since they must be operational on demand. This presupposes monitoring of their charge with triggering of their recharging if  
10 appropriate, and recharging after usage.

These devices customarily comprise a plurality of identical storage elements connected in series, for example electrochemical cells or supercapacitors. The number of elements depends on the application aimed at: typically 24 volts in the industrial sector, 28 volts in the aeronautical sector  
15 and 42 volts in the automotive sector. If we take cells of lithium-ion type (4 volts for a charged cell) and an aeronautical application, an energy storage device thus typically comprises 7 elements. A charger, comprising a power converter supplied by the main network and whose output is regulated in voltage and in current, makes it possible to charge the cells which are  
20 connected in series.

The storage elements used are such that the voltage at their terminals is dependent on the state of charge. In a known manner, these storage elements are poor at withstanding overloads and/or overly large discharges. If we take the example of cells of rechargeable lithium-ion battery  
25 type, these cells have very beneficial energy-related and mass-related performance, but pose problems for managing their charge in tandem with their utilization. This is a hindrance for applications in which long duration and high reliability are sought. In particular, these cells are very sensitive to overvoltages, thereby requiring monitoring of the voltage at the terminals of  
30 each cell. If we take the example of supercapacitors which are capacitors obtained by stacking thin films, and which are characterized by a low voltage (of the order of a volt to a few volts), and a very high value of capacitance, of

the order of several farads. The voltage at the terminals of each capacitor may be shifted with respect to that of the others capacitors because of difference of values and or of leakage currents.

Placed in series, the storage elements will not therefore all behave  
5 in the same way: they may be in an different initial state of charge; some may have leakage currents; others a different energy storage capacity, either due to natural initial scatter between elements or due to aging. All these differences of behavior manifest themselves by a recharging time and voltages which vary. If the recharging of the storage device is managed by  
10 observing the voltage across its terminals, if a cell recharges more quickly than the others, it will overcharge (voltage greater than 4 volts for a lithium cell). Conversely, a cell much slower to recharge will undercharge (voltage below 3.5 volts for a lithium cell). In both cases, these are conditions very unfavorable to the reliability of these cells, and consequently, of the storage  
15 device itself. Furthermore, the differences of state of charges which may exist initially will be accentuated with the successive charging/discharging cycles, inducing poor operation of the device, by premature degradation of its performance.

For these various reasons, rigorous management of such an  
20 energy storage device so as to improve the reliability thereof may not be based on just the monitoring of the voltage available at the end terminals of the device. Use is thus made of a battery monitoring unit generally referred as BMU, which acts as a protection mechanism. This BMU checks that each of the storage elements does not exceed a critical threshold voltage while  
25 charging and/or discharging. Furthermore, it monitors the activation of a system for equilibrating the series elements of the energy storage device. The function of such an equilibrating system is to maintain an identical voltage on all the storage elements. The basic principle of equilibration consists in the monitoring by the BMU of all the voltage differences between  
30 the series elements of the storage device, so as to trigger the equilibrating system as soon as at least one of these voltage differences exceeds a certain critical value. For example, if we exceed 60 millivolts between the most charged storage element and the least charged storage element, the equilibrating system is triggered. The equilibrating system will be stopped  
35 when the voltage difference reverts to an acceptable value, for example 30

millivolts. The basic principle of re-equilibration is to tap an amount of energy off from the most charged element or elements so as to dissipate it or transfer it to the least charged elements. In aeronautics, such an equilibrating system succeeds in being able to equilibrate the charges both in charging  
 5 mode and in standby mode awaiting use of the energy reserve, so as to increase the availability thereof.

## DISCUSSION OF THE BACKGROUND

A system for equilibrating of the state of the art is represented in  
 10 figure 1. In this example, the energy storage device 1 comprises  $n=6$  storage elements in series,  $C_1$  to  $C_6$ . The voltage equilibrating system consists in envisaging  $n-1$  identical bidirectional charge transfer modules, each charge transfer module  $M_{i,i+1}$  being assigned to two energy storage elements  $C_i$  and  $C_{i+1}$  connected in series: In the example we thus have a module  $M_{1,2}$  which  
 15 pairs the storage elements  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  so as to perform if appropriate a charge transfer between these two elements.

The charge transfer modules are controlled (com) by the charge management system BMU, when the latter detects an overly large voltage deviation between two storage elements of the series network. When they  
 20 are activated, each charge transfer module ensures a charge transfer between the two storage elements thus paired, by injecting a current proportional to the voltage difference between the two storage elements into the storage element exhibiting the lowest voltage across its terminals. A charge transfer module  $M_{i-1,i}$  associated with the pair of storage elements  
 25  $C_{i-1}$ ,  $C_i$ , can for example be produced by an electronic circuit of three-pole type with charge pump as illustrated in figure 2. This circuit comprises three terminals A, B and G. The storage element  $C_i$  is connected between the terminals A and G, and the storage element  $C_{i-1}$  is connected between the terminals G and B, the point G being thus connected to the connection node  
 30 between the two adjacent elements  $C_i$  and  $C_{i-1}$ . This three-pole circuit comprises in this exemplary embodiment, a charge capacitor 2 and two pairs of high and low switches (T1, B1) (T2, B2), by which the capacitor is alternately connected in parallel to a storage element,  $C_i$ , by the terminals A and G, then to the other  $C_{i+1}$ , by the terminals G and B. The turning on and  
 35 off of the switches tracks the clock frequency of the command signal com,

provided by the BMU. The application of a command signal com of binary type, at the frequency  $f$ , causes the alternate switching of the two pairs, the first pair (T1, B1) on the high level ("1") of the signal com and the second pair (T2, B2) on the low level ("0").

5 A drawback of such an equilibrating system is that the energy excess on a storage element is transferred to the adjacent storage element, and so on and so forth according to a chained mode of transfer, the arrangement of the charge transfer modules corresponding to the series structure of the storage elements.

10 From the energy standpoint, it is not very good: if the first module ensures energy efficiency of 90%, 10% is lost from module to module.

Furthermore the charge transfer modules are generally dimensioned so as to pass a certain amount of energy corresponding typically to that due to a single unequilibrated element in the network. If two  
15 elements are unequilibrated in the network, the module is thus limited by its capacity in current. Hence, the time for equilibrating the series network will be twice as long.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

20 An aim of the invention is to propose an optimal system for equilibrating  $n$  series elements of an energy storage device, this equilibrating system being able to be activated both in charging mode and in use mode of the energy reserve.

This aim is achieved by an equilibrating system comprising  $h$   
25 bidirectional charge transfer modules. According to the invention, with each storage element is associated  $p$  modules, each module pairing the said storage element with another storage element of the energy storage device.

This results for each of the  $n$  storage elements of the energy storage device, in a transfer of charge corresponding to a current  
30 proportional to the voltage average on the  $p$  associated elements.

The transfer modules are more numerous, but are also smaller, since for each storage element of the network, the charge transfer is distributed by  $p$  modules.

The equilibration of the network also converges more rapidly.

Thus the invention relates to an energy storage device comprising a series network of  $n$  storage elements able to provide a continuous voltage across its terminals, and a plurality of charge transfer modules, each module ensuring a bidirectional transfer of charge between two storage elements of the said network.

According to the invention, an optimal equilibrating system is obtained by providing with a charge transfer on each of the  $n$  elements of the network which is distributed over each of the other  $n-1$  elements of the series network. This is achieved by associating with each of the  $n$  storage elements,  $n-1$  transfer modules, each module being associated with one out of the other  $n-1$  storage elements.

Such a system requires  $n(n-1)/2$  charge transfer modules.

The invention thus relates to an energy storage device comprising a series network of  $n$  storage elements able to provide a continuous voltage across its terminals, and a plurality of charge transfer modules, each module ensuring a bidirectional transfer of charge between two storage elements of the said network, characterized in that it comprises  $n(n-1)/2$  identical modules, each storage element being paired with each of the other  $n-1$  storage elements of the network by  $(n-1)$  associated modules.

According to another aspect of the invention, for the case where  $n=2^m$ , we envisage advantageously that the device comprises  $n-1$  modules of three-pole type, distributed as  $m-1$  groups of rank 0 to  $m-1$ , such that to the group of rank  $i$  there corresponds  $2^i$  modules, each associated with  $n/2^i$  elements arranged as two assemblies so as to form a pair, the modules of the said group of rank  $i \neq 0$  being dimensioned so as to have a gain in current  $2^i$  times as large as the gain in current of the module of the group of rank 0.

According to another aspect of the invention, for the case where  $n=2^m-x$ , characterized in that it comprises a number  $l$  of modules of three-pole type, with  $n-1-x < l \leq n-1$  modules, distributed as  $m-1$  groups of rank 0 to  $m-1$ , such that to the group of rank  $i$  there corresponds at most  $2^i$  modules, each associated with  $n/2^i$  elements arranged as two assemblies so as to form a pair, the modules of the said group of rank  $i \neq 0$  being dimensioned so as to have a gain in current  $2^i$  times as large as the gain in current of the module of the group of rank 0.

Still other objects and advantages of the present invention will become readily apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description, wherein the preferred embodiments of the invention are shown and described, simply by way of illustration of the best mode contemplated of carrying out the invention. As will be realized, the invention is capable of other and different embodiments, and its several details are capable of modifications in various obvious aspects, all without departing from the invention.

Accordingly, the drawings and description thereof are to be regarded as illustrative in nature, and not as restrictive.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- figure 1 illustrates an equilibrating system according to the state of the art;
- figure 2 illustrates an exemplary charge transfer module which can be used in an equilibrating system;
- figure 3 illustrates a first embodiment of an equilibrating system according to the invention;
- figure 4 illustrates an exemplary charge transfer module which can be used in an equilibrating system according to the invention;
- figure 5 illustrates another embodiment of a reequilibrating system according to the invention;
- figures 6a, 6b and 6c illustrate the equilibrating phenomenon obtained with an equilibrating system such as represented in figure 5; and
- figures 7a and 7b illustrate the equilibrating time gain obtained with an equilibrating system according to the invention (fig.7a) with respect to a system according to the state of the art (fig.7b) and
- figure 8 represents a variant embodiment of the system for reequilibrating of figure 5.

An equilibrating system according to the invention comprises  $h$  charge transfer modules,  $h \geq n-1$ .

The basic principle of the invention for each storage element of the series network, is to distribute the charge transfer over  $p$  elements,  $p \leq n-1$ .

Let  $C_i$  be a storage element.  $p$  charge transfer modules are associated with it, each module pairing this element  $C_i$  with another storage

element of the device. Each module thus ensures a direct transfer of a part of the energy between the element  $C_i$  and each of the  $p$  elements which are paired with it. The current injected is thus proportional to the voltage difference between the element  $C_i$  and the average of the voltages across the  
 5 terminals of the other  $p$  elements.

The charge transfer modules must be dimensioned in number and in gain in current so that ultimately, the energy to be transferred is distributed over all the elements.

10 A first embodiment of the invention is represented in figure 3. In this embodiment, we have  $p = n-1$ . The total number of modules is thus equal to  $n(n-1)/2$ .

Each storage element  $C_i$  is paired with each of the other  $n-1$  elements of the storage device by a specific charge transfer module. This  
 15 combinatorial arrangement is represented in figure 3 by using the representation termed Pascal's triangle. The energy storage elements  $C_1$  to  $C_7$  are represented on the diagonal. In the Pascal triangle, we find the  $n(n-1)/2$  charge transfer modules which make it possible to link each of the elements of the diagonal to another element of this diagonal.

20 For example, the element  $C_7$  is paired:  
 - with the element  $C_6$ , by the module  $M_{7,6}$ ;  
 - with the element  $C_5$ , by the module  $M_{7,5}$ ;  
 - with the element  $C_4$ , by the module  $M_{7,4}$ ;  
 - with the element  $C_3$ , by the module  $M_{7,3}$ ;  
 25 - with the element  $C_2$ , by the module  $M_{7,2}$ ;  
 - with the element  $C_1$ , by the module  $M_{7,1}$ .

This arrangement assumes the use as charge transfer module of the electronic circuits of three-pole type as represented in figure 2, for pairing two adjacent elements, and of four-pole type for pairing two remote elements.  
 30 Such an electronic circuit of four-pole type is represented in figure 4, in an example of linear bidirectional charge transfer performed by charge pump by means of a capacitor as in the three-pole example of figure 2. This four-pole then has four terminals  $ABG_1G_2$ , the terminals  $G_1, G_2$  being connected to the same point in the case of adjacent elements, this being equivalent to three-  
 35 poles.

The regulating principle is thus effected for each storage element by direct transfer to each of the other  $n-1$  elements, by means of a current proportional to the voltage difference between this element and the voltage average across the terminals of the other  $n-1$  elements:  $I=k \cdot \Delta V$ .

If we assume that we have an excess of voltage  $\Delta V$  on the element  $C_4$ , the other storage elements all being at the same voltage  $V$ , a charge transfer will be performed from the element  $C_4$  to the other elements  $C_1, C_2, C_3, C_5, C_6$ , and  $C_7$  so that each of these 6 elements receives a current of  $k \frac{\Delta V}{7}$ . At the same time, a current of  $k \frac{6\Delta V}{7}$  will be tapped off from the element  $C_4$ .

These injected and tapped off currents will eventually bring about equilibrium in the voltage across the terminals of the various cells. When equilibrium is achieved, each element has a voltage of  $V + \frac{\Delta V}{7}$  across its terminals.

In practice, the equilibration is effected for all the elements at the same time. The transfer modules are all charged at the same time, once, in parallel. Equilibrium is attained much faster.

It is this that is illustrated in figures 7a and 7b, for an energy storage device, starting from a zero initial state of charge, having a cell of energy capacity 5% lower than that of the other cells.

Figure 7b corresponds to an equilibrating system with chained structure of modules, according to the state of the art (figs 1 and 2). Curves 10 and 11 represent the minimum and maximum values of the compensation current of the normal cells. Curve 12 represents the charging current common to all the cells originating from the battery charger. Seen therein is a regulating phase at constant current followed by an exponential decay of this charging current when the charger passes from regulation in current mode to regulation in voltage mode. Curves 13 and 14 show the evolution envelope of the voltages across the terminals of each cell. Equilibrium is achieved at around  $t=240$  min.

Figure 7a, shows that an equilibrating system according to the invention makes it possible to achieve equilibrium much more rapidly, at around  $t=120$  min.



In this first exemplary embodiment of a system for equilibrating energy of a device comprising  $n$  energy storage elements in series,  $n(n-1)/2$  modules are necessary, all identical, that is to say dimensioned identically so as to pass the same current  $I_{max}$ .

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Figures 5 and 6a to 6c relate to another embodiment of an equilibrating system according to the invention, by which the number of modules required is reduced to  $n-1$  when  $n$  is a power of 2, i.e.  $n=2^m$ . The modules are then all of three-pole type ABG.

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This reduction is obtained by using the reduction to base two of the number  $n$  of storage elements of the series network.

We recall that a transfer module of three-pole type provides a current  $I$  proportional to the voltage difference  $V_{AG}-V_{GB}$ . We denote by  $k$  this proportionality factor:  $I = k [V_{AG}-V_{GB}]$ .

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According to the invention, we then have  $m$  groups of transfer modules, of rank 0 to  $m-1$ . Each group of rank  $i=0$  to  $m-1$  comprises  $2^i$  modules. Each module of this group of rank  $i \neq 0$  is dimensioned so as to have a gain in current  $k_i 2^i$  times as large as the module of the group of rank 0. Each module is connected in parallel to a group of  $n/2^i$  storage elements arranged as two assemblies so as to form a pair.

20

More particularly, if we take the example represented in figure 5, with  $n=8=2^3$  storage elements in series. In this example, we have  $m=3$ . We thus have  $m=3$  groups of modules  $GM^0$ ,  $GM^1$ ,  $GM^2$  of rank respectively 0, 1 and 2.

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The group  $GM^0$ , of rank 0, comprises  $2^0=1$  transfer module, denoted  $M0$ , connected between the end terminals of the network (in parallel with the  $n$  storage elements).

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The group of rank 1, comprises  $2^1=2$  transfer modules, denoted  $M1_0$  and  $M1_1$ . Each module is connected in parallel to  $n/2^1=4$  series storage elements arranged as two assemblies each of two elements, to form a pair. Each module is dimensioned so as to have a gain in current  $2^1$  times as large as the module  $M0$ .

We thus have  $M1_0$  connected in parallel to  $C_5, C_6, C_7, C_8$ , with the reference point  $G$  of the three-pole connected to the mid-point  $N_6$  of this series

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assembly (between  $C_6$  and  $C_7$ ). Likewise,  $M1_1$  is connected in parallel to  $C_1$ ,  $C_2$ ,  $C_3$ ,  $C_4$ , with the reference point  $G$  of the three-pole connected to the mid-point  $N_2$  of this series assembly (between  $C_2$  and  $C_3$ ).

The group of rank 2, comprises  $2^2=4$  transfer modules, denoted  
 5  $M2_0$  to  $M2_3$ . Each module is connected in parallel to  $n/2^2=2$  series storage elements which form a pair. They have a gain in current  $2^2$  as large as the module  $M0$ .

For example the module  $M2_0$  is connected in parallel to  $C_7$  and  $C_8$ , with the reference point  $G$  connected to the mid-point  $N_7$  of connection between these  
 10 two elements. The other modules of this group, respectively  $M2_1$ ,  $M2_2$  and  $M2_3$  are connected in a similar manner, respectively to  $(C_6, C_5)$ ,  $(C_4, C_3)$  and  $(C_2, C_1)$ .

As in the first embodiment, the transfer modules are all charged at the same time, once, so as to effect the equilibration. Identical performance  
 15 is obtained. The difference is to do with the reduced number of modules.

An example of charge equilibrating is represented in figure 6a, for a storage device in accordance with figure 5, with  $n=8$  storage elements, in an example where all the elements have a voltage  $V_n$  across their terminals, except one, in the example  $C_5$ , which has a voltage  $V_n+\Delta V$ .

20 The modules of the group  $GM^2$  operate in pairs of adjacent elements, represented in the figure by rectangles along the column  $GM^2$ . For the equilibrated pairs of elements, transfer is zero. For the pair  $a$  containing the element  $C_5$ , the transfer can be written as an amount of negative charge  $-Q$  tapped off from the element  $C_5$  and an amount of positive charge  $+Q$   
 25 transferred to the element  $C_6$ . To mark the gain of four assigned to the modules of this column, we write  $+Q=+4$  and  $-Q=-4$ .

The modules of the group  $GM^1$  each operate on four adjacent elements, arranged as two assemblies of two elements to form a pair. Each pair is represented in the figure by a rectangle in column  $GM^1$ . The pair  
 30  $\{(C_1, C_2), (C_3, C_4)\}$  is equilibrated, transfer is zero for this assembly. For the pair  $b \{(C_5, C_6), (C_7, C_8)\}$  containing the element  $C_5$ , the transfer can be written as an amount of negative charge  $-Q$  tapped off from the series assembly  $(C_5, C_6)$  and an amount of positive charge  $+Q$  transferred to the series assembly  $(C_7, C_8)$ . To mark the gain of two assigned to the modules of  
 35 this column, we write  $+Q=+2$  and  $-Q=-2$ .

The module of the group  $GM^0$  operates on the eight adjacent elements, arranged as two assemblies of four elements to form a pair  $c$  represented in the figure by a rectangle along column  $GM^0$ :  $\{(C_1, C_2, C_3, C_4), (C_5, C_6, C_7, C_8)\}$ . This pair  $c$  containing the element  $C_5$ , the transfer can be  
 5 written as an amount of negative charge  $-Q$  tapped off from the series assembly  $(C_5, C_6, C_7, C_8)$  and an amount of positive charge  $+Q$  transferred to the series assembly  $(C_1, C_2, C_3, C_4)$ . To mark that this module serves as reference for the gain in current, which is the same as saying that we allocate a unit gain to  $M0$ , we write  $+Q=+1$  and  $-Q=-1$ .

10 The column  $\Sigma 1$  represents the sum of the charges transferred to each element of the network. The amount of charge tapped off from the element  $C_5$  is distributed over each of the other elements which therefore receives an amount of charge equal to the amount of charge tapped off divided by the number of elements over which it is distributed.

15 This transfer is effected by charging all the modules of the equilibrating system at the same time, in parallel, hence a particularly advantageous gain in equilibrating time.

This embodiment of an equilibrating system according to the invention with a reduced number of charge transfer modules has just been  
 20 described in an exemplary energy storage device containing a number  $n$  of elements that is expressed as a power of two:  $n=2^m$ .

In the case where  $n$  is any integer which may be written:  $n=2^m-x$ , we show that it is possible to construct an equilibrating system of this type, by  
 25 using  $x$  virtual storage elements to build the structure of the system. In practice, we obtain an equilibrating system comprising  $l$  modules, with  $l$  an integer such that  $n-1-x < l \leq n-1$ .

If we return to figure 5. In the storage elements  $C_1$  to  $C_8$  represented, we now consider the storage device to comprise only 7  
 30 elements, this generally being the case for applications in aeronautics (with lithium-ion cells).

The real number of elements is therefore  $n=7$ . We have

$$2^{m-1} \leq n \leq 2^m, \text{ or else } n=2^m-1.$$

We then design the structure by adding 1 virtual cell which is  $C_8$  in  
 35 figure 5.

This virtual element does not in reality exist in the structure. The storage device 100 with these  $n=7$  elements  $C_1$  to  $C_7$  and its equilibrating system is in reality as represented in figure 8. The terminals A of the modules  $M2_0$ ,  $M1_0$  and  $M0_0$  are linked in common by means of a connection line X.

5 The potential VX on this line X is in an undefined state initially. We show that when the equilibrating system is activated, the equilibrating system is such that it establishes the potential VX at a level such that the current which is induced in the virtual element  $C_8$  is necessarily zero. It is this that is represented in the arrays of figures 6b and 6c, to be taken in combination

10 with that of figure 6a.

We have seen that the array of figure 6a illustrates the case of a device with  $n=8$  elements, in which the equilibrating system has been activated on detection of an imbalance, due to an excess of charge on the element  $C_5$ . The total charge transfer which is established for each cell is

15 given in the column  $\Sigma 1$  this array, has already been explained.

But we consider the case where the element  $C_8$  is virtual : the current due to the charge transfer caused by the equilibrating system must therefore be zero in this element.

We show that the potential VX on the line X is established

20 automatically at a given value so that this is actually the case. It is as if the system were to behave so that the virtual element likewise induces a charge transfer, such that the sum of the two charge transfers, that due to  $C_5$  and that due to the virtual element cancels out for the virtual element. The array of figure 6b shows the charge transfer which would be due to the virtual

25 element. The column  $\Sigma 2$  gives the total charge transfer which is established for each cell.

The column  $\Sigma = \Sigma 1 + \Sigma 2$  in the array of figure 6c represents the superposition of the two transfers: we indeed obtain zero transfer on the virtual element. The charge transfer is distributed from the element  $C_5$  to the

30 other 6 elements of the storage device 100. The voltage across the terminals of the virtual cell is therefore established at  $V_n + \Delta V/7$ .

In the example of figure 8, the equilibrating system is built on the basis of a single virtual element. In the general case where  $n=2^m-x$ , with  $x \geq 1$ ,

35 there are x virtual elements.

In the case where  $x > 1$ , the equilibrating system can be simplified by eliminating from the system any module which would have all its terminals A, B, G linked to virtual elements. We have then  $l$  modules with  $n-1-x < l \leq n-1$ . In this case, the  $l$  modules are distributed as  $m-1$  groups of rank 0 to  $m-1$ , such  
5 that to the group of rank  $i$  there corresponds at most  $2^i$  modules ( $M1_0, M1_1$ ), each associated with  $n/2^i$  elements arranged as two assemblies so as to form a pair, the modules of the said group of rank  $i \neq 0$  being dimensioned so as to pass  $2^i$  times more current than the module  $M0$ .

10 The invention which has just been described is particularly beneficial in respect of all systems where one seeks to improve the performance of the energy storage device at lesser cost.

The invention applies to any equilibrating system using bidirectional and linear charge transfer modules. In particular, the invention is  
15 not limited to the example with the modules of the charge pump type given merely by way of illustration.

Throughout the description, the charge transfer module has a linear current transfer characteristic when the voltages of the two cells which are connected to it are close to equilibrium. We speak of linearity to first  
20 order. The charge equilibrating system will continue to operate correctly if the gain in current is not linear but it transfers a current of the same sign as the difference in voltage across the cell terminals.

It will be readily seen by one of ordinary skill in the art that the  
25 present invention fulfils all of the objects set forth above. After reading the foregoing specification, one of ordinary skill in the art will be able to affect various changes, substitutions of equivalents and various aspects of the invention as broadly disclosed herein. It is therefore intended that the protection granted hereon be limited only by the definition contained in the  
30 appended claims and equivalent thereof.